

DISDAIN FOR SCIENCE

A very large part of the people, mostly among those who have completed their formal secondary or college education, would agree that since the Renaissance and even more so after the Industrial Revolution, science has played a very important role in the progress of mankind and the improvement of its living conditions. Some consequences of the advancement of science, or of its utilization by man, have been disastrous, but these certainly do not constitute a majority.

It is difficult to understand, then, that some governments in our region adopt positions and implement politics that imply an absolute disdain for science and, furthermore, for knowledge. How can it be explained that, facing a situation of limited food production together with currency difficulties to import, laws are enacted that could be considered as 'anti-science', high level offices are established that would seem to be 'departments for involution' and indefinitely postpone the implementation of awaited and repeatedly promised policies oriented to the promotion of science.

In Venezuela, where a prominent scientific community has existed, a law has been enacted, known as the 'seed law', which not only forbids research aimed at obtaining more productive seeds, but impedes the import and usage of transgenic materials. It is a clear disdain of the achievements accomplished during the last century with the so-called 'green revolution', which allowed to feed millions of people that otherwise would have died of famine. The law disdains the productivity increase in numerous agricultural staples that was accomplished thanks to the genetic discovery and transformation of species in order to make them more resistant to pests and drought, more productive and healthier. Such a law, of course, favors the application of techniques and procedures identified with popular wisdom.

In this same country, in view of the urgency to solve important problems of food supply, a new governmental

department has been established, that of 'urban agriculture'. A concept that is foreign to natural sciences, although perhaps it fits among the political sciences. In face of the imminence of severe epidemics caused by viruses transmitted by insects there are thoughts of re-editing fumigation programs for vector elimination, conceived and led by scientists almost a century ago, which abolished at the time this kind of diseases.

In Chile, another intermediate country in the region, where the scientific community also makes efforts to provide society with useful knowledge, year after year structuring an instance for the promotion of science has been postponed. A central government office at ministerial level that would not be dependent on other systems which, being more politicized up to now have not been able to foster the progress of science with the expected emphasis. The annual budgets for the science, technology and innovation sector are at a standstill, the fellowships for training of scientists do not increase and, even worse, starting projects for the researcher career have been cut down. There is disdain for science.

It would be convenient to follow the example of those countries, of which there are some in the region, that have allocated resources and provided appropriate structures for scientific knowledge to be generated in larger quantities and adapted at a faster pace to the local environment, so as to provide benefits to society.

Our citizens require and deserve better education, health and wellbeing. Such things cannot be achieved through disdain for science and the acquisition of foreign military technology but, on the contrary, with clear and forceful policies, implemented as seriously as it can be, that would allow the progress of science.

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